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TO

BOOK AGENTS,

BY AN OLD CANVASSER.

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TORONTO

P. R. RANDALL,—PUBLISHER.

1864.

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HINTS

TO

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Book Agents,

BY AN OLD CANVASSER.

TORONTO:

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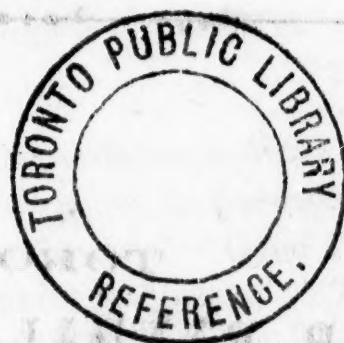
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HINTS TO AGENTS.

The subscription business has long been a favorite one for disposing of books. It seems peculiarly adapted to our wide and comparatively sparsely settled country, enabling you to bring your works directly to the notice of immense numbers of people, who would never think of inquiring for or obtaining them through any other channel. With useful books you go forth as a moral colporteur into the highways and byways of the land, with the proud consciousness that the seeds of knowledge thus scattered broadcast may produce a rich harvest of good upon the rising destinies of your country. Your avocation, if rightly pursued, is an ennobling one, and gives you an opportunity to gather "leaves from the book of human life," such as no ordinary occupation confers. You enter a field of labor capable of developing the most brilliant genius; and one which, if properly improved, may be a stepping-

stone to the most honorable and elevated positions in society. Some of our wealthiest men have commenced business in this way.

It is estimated that at least nine-tenths of all our most successful business men start in life with little or no capital other than energy and a good character. With such, a few months spent in getting subscribers to a good book is worth more than a year's drilling in school or in the counting-room. It will give you a practical knowledge of the world—of men and their motives—of human nature in all its manifestations, that you would be a long time, if ever, in acquiring from any other source. You will learn how to approach those to whom you desire to sell something, how to gain their attention to your goods, how to persuade without seeming to, how to make customers of those who are at first disinclined to buy—in a word, *how to trade*; while, if you wish to make it a *permanent* business, after once learning to skillfully touch these mainsprings to human action, we venture to assert you will find it more profitable than any other honorable one you could engage in, involving no greater amount of capital.

Although it would be impossible to lay down

specific rules to guide you in every case in the prosecution of your work, yet the following general directions are the results of long experience, and if carefully studied and duly followed, cannot fail to make you in the end a successful Agent. You may meet with difficulties and sometimes despond ; but if so, return to these " hints," read them over carefully, see where you have erred and try it again ; and if this is followed up, our business will eventually " put money in your purse." The poet truly says :—

Be bold and active conquer difficulties
By daring to attempt them ; sloth and folly
Shiver and shrink at sights of toil and hazard,
And make the impossibility they fear.

Most of the uninitiated think it would be much more profitable to take a quantity of books and sell as they go ; but the experience of all successful agents is in favor of the subscription plan. It is the only reliable mode for you to sell books. It is much easier to obtain promises than money ; and men will make these for a book at a round figure, when they could not be induced to buy on the spot at half price.

Although a persevering agent *can* sell almost any book, yet it is far pleasanter, as well as more

profitable, to have those adapted to the wants of all classes of the community, and of such a high moral tone and character that you can honestly and conscientiously recommend them. You can thus point out their beauties with that genial confidence and high moral force, that go far toward insuring a rapid sale. In all our own Works we have ever had this end in view, publishing only such as are useful and elevating in their tone, and ever aiming for the best work on the particular subject or subjects of which it treats. Our HISTORY OF ALL THE RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS OF THE WORLD has probably had a larger sale, and given better satisfaction to its purchasers, than any other Book ever issued, whose sale was confined exclusively to the subscription business. With the same end in view, we issued our thoroughly revised and enlarged edition of FLEETWOOD'S LIFE OF CHRIST—the only correct one now published—our editions of THE FAMILY BIBLE, BUNYAN'S COMPLETE WORKS, etc., etc. We shall improve these, and add others to the list as occasion may require.

On entering the business you should procure sample copies of these Works; together with a blank subscription book, in which to enter the

names and residence of subscribers, and the name and price of book. Almost any blank book may be made to answer for this purpose; but as appearances go a great way in this, as in other branches of trade, we furnish an article at a small cost for those who prefer them, neatly bound and properly ruled, with printed headings and prospectus sheets of the books. You will also want a good pocket-inkstand and pens. The most convenient method of carrying them is in a neat satchel or carpet-bag if you go on foot, or a pair of saddle-bags if on horseback. It would be well also to have a trunk sufficiently capacious to hold your sample copies and clothing, which can be left at the County seat, or some other as large and equally convenient a locality.

In a thickly settled country always travel on foot while obtaining subscribers, as it is less expensive than with a horse, and quite as expeditious, all things considered; while the latter is usually cumbersome, and occupies much of that time and attention which should be devoted to business. In more sparsely settled sections, in Canada, a horse is preferable, it being not unfrequently from two to five miles from house to house. Where you have no horse, one can usually

be obtained sufficiently long for delivering purposes from some one with whom you have become acquainted while soliciting. A good business can be done, however, in thickly settled sections, at delivering on foot, where you can get the books taken to the immediate vicinity of your labors.

On starting a list, your first object should be to head it with the names of some leading men of all parties and sects. Their influence will act like a charm among their friends and the lower classes. You will find that your first names will be noticed more than any others. Let these be influential persons in the community, such as lawyers, physicians, and ministers, and scores of persons will need little persuasion in following such subscriptions. Start your list right, and the work is half done; and rather than miss such you would be justifiable in sometimes making a discount to a minister or an editor. On the other hand, avoid the names of worthless or disreputable characters, for men of standing will frequently refuse to sign a paper in connection with such. It is better to reject an inferior name altogether than to start a list with it. If, however, as a beginner you lack the nerve to go to those influential parties at first,

then commence at once with *respectable* farmers, merchants, or mechanics; and go to these as you gain more confidence. It is the best thing you can do.

As a general thing, a new Agent runs over a large tract of country to do a small business, while an experienced man feels his way, step by step, visiting everybody, chatting the while with one, laughing with another, picking up and communicating bits of local news, and making himself generally agreeable, and ends by doing a large amount of business in a very small territory; besides leaving behind him many smiling faces ever pleased to see him again, and ready and anxious to take the book when it "comes around." Like other new agents, on my first trip in this business I went over about half a county in two weeks, obtaining some twenty-five subscribers, and thought I had done a fine business. Afterward, "seeing the error of my way," I spent seven weeks on the same ground, and procured over three hundred subscribers for the same book. I had not penetrated the "by" places where the best business was done.

When you commence to canvass a county, or

district, take the neighbourhoods in such order that you may at all times know precisely where you have been, and go thoroughly, visiting every house. To do this skillfully, you should make yourself fully acquainted with the geography of the county or section you are in. Then have a real or imaginary boundary for each particular locality, taking care that these boundaries shall not cover too much space. A county, township, or district line will do for one side; a river, creek, canal, rail-road or common road will do for another. Then inquire out and call upon *every man* who is able to buy a book, adhering closely to your boundaries until that division is canvassed. Have a pocket memorandum-book with you, and note down in pencil any who are away, and on whom you are to call again. When through with the first canvass, go over the ground again and again, until all have had a chance. When through with this neighbourhood go on to another. It is all important to *go through*, and this is the only way in which that object can be accomplished. It may look like a slow way of getting along; but like rolling up a snow ball, it gathers as it goes, until the force becomes almost irresistible.

As a beginner, you had as well commence immediately in the country, or in some small village, leaving the larger places untouched, until you have acquired more skill and experience. When you get ready to try the larger places, start your list, if possible, with some of the leading characters, and then canvass each street or road by course. Take one side at a time, and with your pencil note down, as in the country, those who are absent, and on whom you are to call again. In this way you will make a thorough canvass. The best business, however, is usually done in the by-places and back neighborhoods, where agents are less likely to frequent, while the poorest is very often upon the most public pikes or thoroughfares.

Learn to approach your man with an easy, pleasant, and natural assurance. If you know his name you may address him by it; and if you choose, you can introduce yourself by name. Strive always to make a favorable impression at first sight, for first impressions in this business will go far toward deciding the question of success. When you enter a town or village consider yourself the welcome guest of the place, and actually make yourself such by your ani-

mated conversation and polite bearing to all you meet. There are certain general principles termed "human nature," common to all, but you will find each particular specimen varied in minor points. By constantly observing these, and adapting yourself to the peculiarities of each, you please those whom you are addressing, and thus wonderfully increase your own influence. Never bluster and get angry; but under all circumstances remain perfectly cool and self-possessed. However great the provocation, listen with pity and bear with philosophy. You thus disarm opposition, increase your own self-respect, and command the good-will of all you meet. In one word, always cultivate *a good address*, remembering that "soft words hurt not the mouth." Treat every one in such a way that you would take pleasure in meeting them again. However sharp you may be to drive a good trade, you can always do this by proper attention to what we have told you. Remember that activity in business, an uncompromising love of truth, and a pleasant easy conversation, properly tempered together, will win upon public confidence, and inspire you with that self-confidence which must triumph over all opposition.

Make yourself perfectly familiar with every part of your book, that you may know at once where to turn for matter to interest your man. Study its *strong points*, and watch "human nature" until you can see, at a glance, what particular point will touch the right spot in the character you are talking to. Whenever tired out stop and rest, spending your time in perusing it, and seeking out new items of interest; for when weary, or in any unpleasant mood, you are in no condition to solicit names, nor will a formal stereotyped description, delivered in a monotonous tone, ever interest your hearer. You must be *animated, natural* and *to the point*. Always have a ready answer to any objection that may be made against your mode of doing business, meeting every argument with a 'clinger.' If a man once fairly gets the start of you, you might as well put up your book and travel. Practice and observation on these points will soon post you up.

Never address a person abruptly, or in a kind of uncertain tone, asking him if he wishes to "subscribe for a book," for then it is probable no such desire exists, and you will invariably get a "No" for an answer. You must first awaken such a

curiosity in the book as to induce him to examine it, and then show him why it is *the* book above all others for him to have. If this is done skillfully, and in accordance with our "instructions," you will generally succeed. You may say you have a new and valuable work that you have called to show him—a History of all the Religious Denominations in the World, with the doctrines peculiar to each. Here take out your book, and show it in such a way as to exhibit its finest points to the most taking advantage. Tell him it first gives a general and very interesting sketch of the three Eastern systems of religion—Judaism, Paganism, and Mohammedanism. Then the several Christian denominations of the World are taken up, and their history, doctrine, government, and statistics given in a clear, impartial, and reliable manner—the whole being illustrated by some two hundred engravings of ministers, leading men, and churches, with other matters of interest connected with each. If you know the denomination your customer belongs to, if any, you can turn to it and read a few such paragraphs as will be most likely to interest him. You can also say, that the denominations are taken up in alphabetical order; and if he questions its impartiality, or

even if he does not, you can prove its reliability by reading him notices from the papers of various sects, which you will find in the circular connected with the work. As we have before told you, do not fall into any set forms of speech by which you address every man alike; but exert your own ingenuity to vary with the varying temperaments you meet, and thus learn to adapt your style to the company you are with. Intimations of its success, and the general favor it has met with among his neighbours and others, a complimentary remark on his own judgment and literary tastes, with a hundred other things that your keen perceptions will suggest, will go far toward securing your man. Always have your pen in readiness at the moment you have got him up to the point, requesting him to enter his name with the others. "Delays are dangerous" in bookselling as in all things else. If you have already got a good list, it will not unfrequently prove a "clincher" to show him this, after other arguments are exhausted, taking particular care that he shall see any prominent names you may have.

The most experienced Agents usually carry but one book, a plan which we decidedly favor. For

beginners, however, it may be as well to take two or more, but in this case one only should be shown at a time; otherwise you distract the attention, waste time, and probably end by selling nothing, or, if anything, the cheapest book you carry. After you are through with the Denominations, therefore, you can take out your Life of Christ. Say that, in connection with the Religious Denominations, you are furnishing, to those who want that fine old work, FLEETWOOD'S LIFE OF CHRIST. You can then read the title-page slowly, and in a clear and distinct tone. Say, that in addition to his Life, we have the Lives of the Apostles, and a history of that most wonderful of all people, the Jews—that it is published in this plain and open type, handsomely illustrated, and bound in this substantial style expressly for family use, and should be the companion of the Bible in every household. You can also read a part or all of the prospectus, with the terms, and end by asking if you shall take his name for that. A similar plan, such as your own sense of propriety will suggest, would be appropriate to any of our other books.

You should always use a pen and ink in procuring names; and every man should be required

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to write his own signature, and the price should be carried out against each book at the time of putting down the names. If from any cause you should vary from the regular terms, give the subscriber a *memorandum* to that effect, carrying out customary prices on your list as usual, and writing (m) after his name. No one will understand this but you and the deliverer, and he will thus know, when he comes to it, that this subscriber has such a paper in his possession. We are opposed to taking subscribers in any other way, except *unconditionally*; but as you may sometimes vary from this, always write (c) after the name, as you would (m) in the instance above. The deliverer then knows that this subscription is a *conditional* one. The observance of these rules produces confidence between you and the deliverer, and may save him and you considerable trouble and loss.

As a general thing it is best to keep the book in your own hands. You can then turn to such points as will be likeliest to interest your hearer; while, if you give it to him, ten chances to one he will turn to the dullest things, omit the best engravings, waste time, soil the work, and get very imperfect ideas of its contents. It is also

well, where you can, to substitute some other word for "subscribe;" as, for instance, say you are "taking orders for the work," or "circulating the work." "Subscribe" sounds bad, and is not likely to be received with favor. If a man at first refuses to listen to your arguments, you may still succeed by a little tact, joined with prudent perseverance. To avoid subscribing, many men will request you to call when the books are delivered, saying they will perhaps take a copy then. Place no dependence in such promises, as it is only done to put you off. If they wont subscribe they wont buy. Use some argument to bring them to the point. Say you have to pay your money for the book, and can order only such as you have a sure market for—that if the book suits him, it is just as easy to give his name at once, as he has ample time to have the money ready for it, and will thus be sure of securing a copy.

A favorite excuse with many is that the price of your book is too high, no matter how low it may really be. This you will find one of the most troublesome points to get over. To do it you must show them some peculiar features which enhance its value. Refer them to its excellent

materials, its numerous and costly engravings, and its handsome and substantial binding. You can also say that we have a heavy copyright to pay on it. By dividing the number of pages in your book by the price, you can say that they are getting two, three, or four pages, as the case may be, for one cent; and ask them if so many handsome pages, and such valuable information, is not worth it. That in fact they are getting it cheaper than a bookstore could furnish it, as it passes direct from the press to the people, without having to pay a half dozen profits to as many different dealers, and without having a large per cent. put upon it to cover rents, clerk hire, and other expenses incident to a store. That as it is only sold by subscription, and the entire country is being canvassed, we are selling such a vast number that book stores could never compete with us in price, even if they were allowed the sale of the book.

You will often have the plea of "poverty" urged. You can remark to this, that a good book is beyond all price. That it is not perishable, like food or clothing, but will last for life, and be an ornament to and confer a credit upon its possessor, and be a never-failing source of pleasure and profit to all who use it. Truths, which it would take

years to glean from other sources, are freely communicated therein. Knowledge is power; and while its possession surrounds one with all the luxuries of life, and elevates him to its highest honors, its absence makes him only "a hewer of wood and a drawer of water." Say that it is the duty of every man to educate himself, as far as he can, with his family, under all circumstances; and quote the remark of Franklin, that "to a young man just starting in life, a good education and no money is a better capital than a large fortune joined to ignorance."

Prejudice against the business must be removed by a presentation of facts. Many men will declare that they have been so imposed upon by subscribing, that they have "sworn off" from ever doing it again; and with a large class a general feeling of distrust seems to exist against agents generally. Unprincipled men have imposed upon the community in this as in all other branches of business, without doubt; but an honorable, straightforward course, joined to frankness, and a pleasant but dignified demeanor, will go far toward disabusing them of this feeling. Once gain the implicit confidence of your man, and you will have little difficulty in getting his subscription.

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Never be bluffed off of good territory by agents with other books. With your works your chance is at least better than theirs. I once came in contact with one in Oxford who was on horseback, while I was on foot. After following him for several days, and finding I was injured by his operations, I determined to "turn the tables" upon him by going in ahead. This I accomplished with success, and canvassed so thoroughly as to leave a bad chance indeed for any one else. I afterwards learned that after canvassing with excellent success, some "Yankee" got in ahead of him, and he was obliged to leave for another county. Here he found a comrade of mine, and thinking the country too overrun with book-agents for a man to do anything there, he left the county in thorough disgust. We cleared over fifty dollars a week.

Avoid men in groups, people at court, or public gatherings of any kind, as you would a pestilence. It *may* do sometimes for the deliverer, but never for a solicitor. People's minds are then taken up with other matters, leaving little time or inclination to listen to your remarks. They will almost invariably refuse to subscribe, and will very likely imbibe a prejudice against you and the book that will cause them again to refuse, should you call

upon them at their homes. Take your man alone on his farm, or at his place of business, and he feels himself particularly addressed, his mind is free to act, and your chances of success are far greater.

Never see any faults in your book. If there are any there, skillfully cover them up, and dwell only on its strong points. Books, like men, are rarely perfect, and you will always find persons criticising, either with or without reason, your paper, printing, engraving, binding, and perhaps the matter in the book. Some beginners hear these things until they begin to believe them; and thinking their work is of no account, lose all heart, and finally give up the business in disgust. This will never do. Compare your work with others, especially subscription books. See where it is fully equal to or excels them. See only excellencies where others see faults; and, above all, always cultivate that buoyant go-ahead spirit that is determined to triumph over all opposition, and this feeling will soon be conquered.

Procuring subscribers is much like fishing, and you may spend days without getting an effectual bite. Always bear in mind, however, that "there are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught,"

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and perseverance will "fetch" them in the end. We have known an experienced agent to travel for a week without making a dollar, and the next week clear \$75. Four fifths of all the failures in this business, we venture to assert, are attributable to nothing but a lack of that *unyielding perseverance* which characterizes Canadian men, everywhere so favourably known for their success in any thing they undertake. The weather may be bad, traveling muddy, people illiterate, money scarce, or crops failing; but any man who would be deterred from a vigorous prosecution of his work by any or all of these causes combined, lacks the *stamina* for battling successfully with the cares of this world. Depend upon it, he will never make his "mark;" and his friends should place him at once under the care of some benevolent institution, where his indolence could sink him quietly into oblivion.

As a general thing, your books should never be promised on any given day, or at any particular time. The delivering is liable to delays from various causes; and should you fail to meet your engagements, the subscriber might consider himself released, and refuse to take his book. Set no *positive* time, but rather let it be so indefinitely fixed, that you can hold him at whatever time best

suits the convenience of the deliverer. From this rule we may except manufacturing towns, where you have a large list of operatives. With this class it would be well to set the time, and have the books on hand in the neighborhood of their pay-day. As a general rule we may say also, that a book should never be left with the promise that the money be sent you by mail, or otherwise. No matter how good your man may be, he will either carelessly or willfully neglect to do as he promises.

Delivering is about as nice a matter as soliciting, for it is one thing to get a man's promise, and quite another to get his money. If the list has been properly taken up there will usually be little difficulty. If, on the contrary, the solicitor has run over a large tract of country for a few names—has taken a good many "conditional" subscribers—has varied in his prices and left a bad impression generally behind him, the deliverer will have need of all his skill and address in getting off the books. As we hope your own good sense, with our instructions on the subject, will teach you to avoid such lists, it will be unnecessary for us enlarge on this point. As a deliverer, however, we may say, that it is one very essential point to show confidence in your man. Act as if you had

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no doubt whatever of his doing as he has agreed. As a case in point, a man who had subscribed for three large books, very coolly told me, when I went to deliver them, that "he was out of money, and could not possibly take them." Without paying the slightest attention to this, I as coolly and quietly laid them out, and proceeded to show him some other books that I had for sale. Before leaving him I sold him over fifty dollars worth, and he went several miles to get the money to pay me with. Had I quibbled or shown any uneasiness at the start, I should doubtless have found it difficult, if not impossible, to get even the subscription from him.

In making orders for books be careful to have the name, and number wanted of each book, written plain and distinct, and state clearly where you want them sent; by what route or routes, and to whose care by the way. You can usually get the information from merchants in your vicinity. Also, state clearly where you want your invoice sent, and allow ample time for the books to reach you after giving the order. Some new agents expect the goods to arrive as soon as a letter will; but to most points where a letter might be two, three, or four days, more or less, by the mail, freight would

probably be as many weeks. We forward the invoice by mail immediately on shipping the goods, hence an agent will *never* expect his books until after he gets his invoice, and will not wait then, but keep moving and adding to his list until his goods arrive, remembering always that "time is money."

In remitting funds always purchase post-office orders where practicable. Make them payable to our order in Toronto, and you can charge the exchange to us when it does not exceed two per cent. If there are no facilities for purchasing orders, send specie or current bank bills by Express, retaining the company's receipt for the same. If no Express be convenient, then get the largest current bank notes you can find, and enclose carefully and plainly to our address. In this case always take a description of the notes enclosed; that is, the name of the bank, the date, number, letter, and to whom payable, with the names of the president and cashier. Retain this for reference in case of any loss. As a general rule, you should never allow over one hundred dollars to accumulate in your hands at a time that rightfully belongs to us; and we shall reserve the right in all cases of refusing to fill your orders

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when this rule is violated. Remember that "short credits make long friends," and promptness in remitting funds will be one of your best passports to success.

The mails are the great arteries through which throb the life of trade. Through them you will at all times keep us thoroughly informed of the extent and kind of your business operations; that is of the name and number of books subscribed for or delivered, the number of conditional subscribers among them, if any, with amount of money taken in, and your expenses, with other matters of interest. Your letters should be as brief as possible consistent with a general summary of your business, and should be forwarded in all cases as often as once a week. Direct them carefully and plainly to P. R. Randall, Toronto, C. W., as in this instance, to prevent the possibility of miscarriage. It is a very good plan to make them up every Saturday night, comprising the week's business, and then to deposit in the first convenient office. We will always answer when necessary, though you will not expect us to attend to *every* communication in order as received. You will be particular to give your address in every letter, and if an answer is expected, with the name of the post-office to which you wish it

returned. In doing this you should always make ample allowance for the time it takes a letter to go and come, together with the time for answering, and any detentions that may occur by the way. If it does not come by the time you wish to leave the locality to which it was to be sent, and the letter is important, leave a written order with the postmaster to forward, naming the office to which you wish it sent; and then if you do not receive it as expected, write him as to it. It is always better to mail your letters at the most important offices in your locality, as well as to have your answers returned to such.

You would do well to come and see us in all cases where practicable, both going to and coming from your field of labors. It involves a direct acquaintance with us, and our method of doing business, that cannot fail to add great force to your efforts in securing orders. You can also get a general insight into the manufacture of books that will enable you to talk clearly and understandingly on that subject with those to whom you go. In going out it is of the utmost importance to start right, and we can make our arrangements far better and more satisfactorily by an interview than by letter. On your return we can

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adjust differences, if any there be, far more pleasantly in a personal interview. The time and cost of such a visit is hardly to be mentioned in comparison with its advantages. Besides, the interests of the employer and employed must be mutual to insure success, and we can blend those interests together by an intimate personal acquaintance, and acquire that confidence in each other that could be gained in no other way. We repeat, *never fail to come*, when at all practicable, and make your arrangements in all cases to stay long enough to have every thing properly adjusted.

We have thus given you some "hints" that we hope may be of service to you. We will close by a description of a model agent, and his method of doing business. He takes but *one book*, and has this large enough for the profit on it to justify him in talking not only a half hour, but a half day if it be necessary, in securing some leading man. He makes himself familiar with its contents, secures his district, and goes into it full of self-reliance—all successful men have been self-reliant—and a courage equal to any emergency. He scans his ground carefully, ascertains the character of its population, and learns who are the prominent men therein. He goes to one of these in a frank and

manly but winning way, states his business, shows his book and its fine points, and secures him if possible, together with a brief written recommendation of the work, occupying two or three lines, immediately under his name. He then goes to another, and another, in a similar way, until he gets his list well started, by which means its moral force becomes so great, that he can soon sweep almost an entire county, obtaining names by hundreds, where, had many another course been pursued at the commencement, he would only have obtained them by twenties. He pays no heed to the opinions of literary men, who say that their section is not a literary one, and he can't sell books there. He knows the fallacy of such opinions where the book is properly introduced. When he goes to a man, it is with the confidence of success, expecting to and feeling that he shall secure him; and after taking time enough to talk to do this, wastes none after that object is accomplished, but pushes on for other names. He looks well to his expenses, studying economy in all things, reports his business every Saturday night to the publisher of his book, and ends as every such indefatigable man should end—by getting rich, and investing in bank stock, real estate, or other first-class securi-

ties, that will produce a steady income for a rainy day, independent of his labor. *"The gods help those who help themselves."*

THE END.

that will provide a steady stream for a rainy
day, independent of the State. "The State help
these men help themselves."

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